

# ReQuest (Reciprocal Questioning)

Teachers are constantly challenged to find ways to get students to read. Research suggests that if we get students to ask and answer questions before reading a text, they will be able to read with a purpose, recognize major characteristics of the texts, activate their prior knowledge, and make predictions about what they are about to read.



Teachers also struggle to get students to interact with text while they are reading. Students do not know how to generate good questions about their reading; they also do not know the difference between lower level informational questions and higher level questions that demand analysis, evaluation, or synthesis.

A successful active comprehension strategy should actually lead students to ask questions that will result in even more questions. In theory, questions that lead to additional questions arouse student interest and curiosity and draw them into the material. When it works, students will read to find the answers to the questions they have generated. Self-constructed questions are powerful. A strategy designed to help students generate these questions is called ReQuest, the focus of this week's *Literacy Light*.

ReQuest is short for "reciprocal questioning."

**Purpose:** to **help** students develop the ability to ask and answer questions about their reading to **deepen** comprehension and critical thinking, in short, to help students **think** as they read

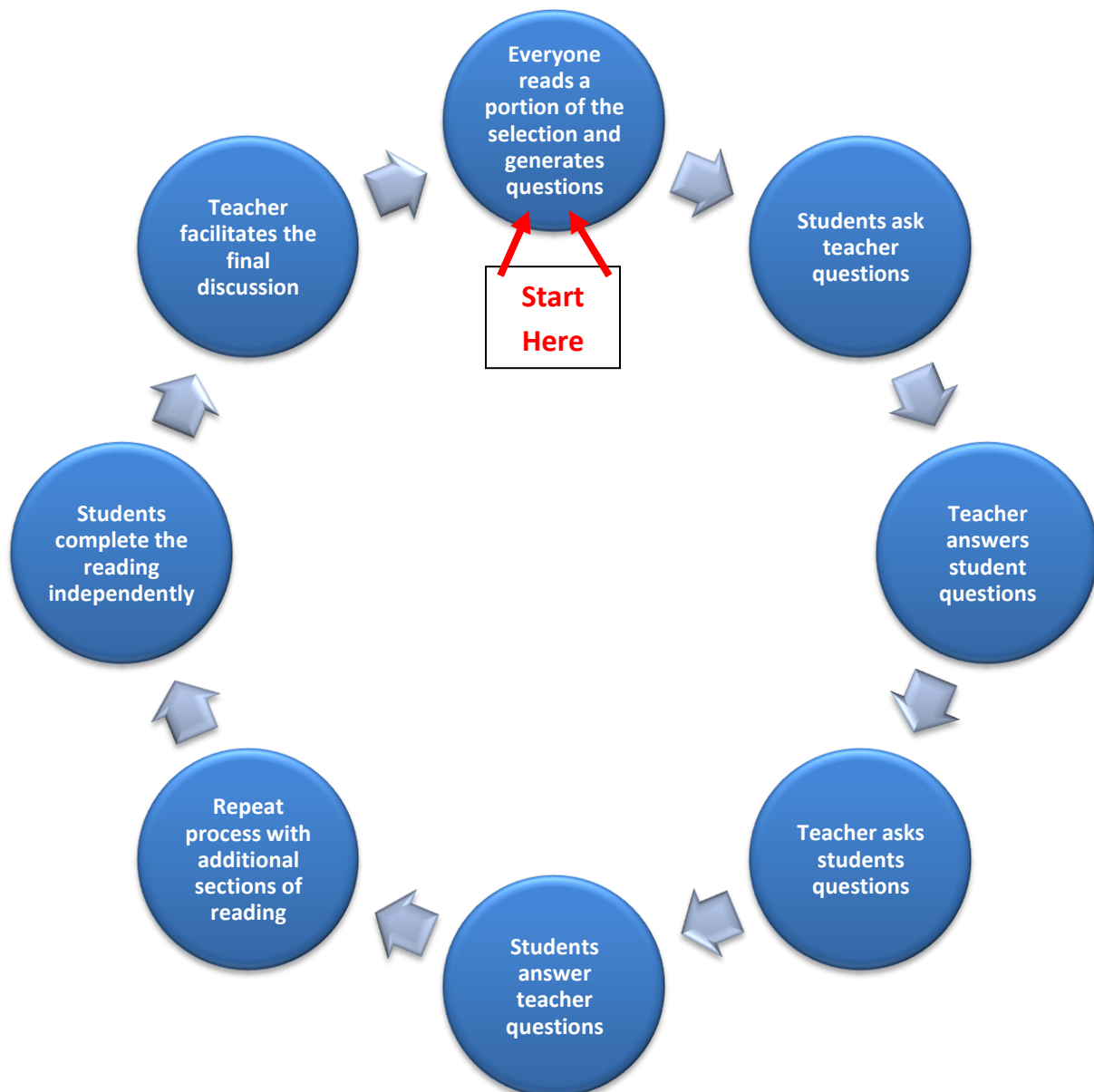
**Description:** Developed originally as a one-on-one procedure for a remedial instructional context, this strategy encourages students to ask their own questions about content material under study. Students take on the role of the teacher to form questions about a reading selection, and the teacher in turn models how to answer. Then the teacher asks questions that require higher level thinking to influence the students to frame more challenging questions about the ideas presented in the reading selection.

## **Procedure:**

1. Students should be informed in advance that they will be taking on the role of a teacher while reading and developing questions about the information and ideas found in the reading. In other words, students need to know that they will be asking the teacher questions about the text after they have read it.
2. Both the students and the teacher silently read the same segment of the text. After everyone has read the passage, they should write a list of questions about the reading. It is helpful if the teacher writes his/her questions along with the students.
3. The teacher invites the students to ask the teacher their questions. The teacher should respond with clear, complete answers in a think-aloud fashion that shows students the mental process the teacher used to derive the answer. Some sources suggest teachers should close the book in order to answer student questions, but it is not necessarily the best practice. Students need to see the teacher refer to the text as needed in order to model this strategy for students.

4. Next there is an exchange of roles. The teacher questions the students about the same text. The teacher's questions should focus on higher level thinking to guide the students in framing more challenging questions with the next section or selection.
5. On completion of the student-teacher exchange, the students and the teacher read the next segment of the text, pausing at the predetermined stopping point. Steps 2 and 3 are then repeated.
6. Students stop questioning and begin predicting. At a suitable point in the text, when the students have processed enough information to make predictions about the remainder of the assignment, the exchange of questions stops. The teacher then asks prediction questions such as "What do you think might happen in the remainder of the text? What has the author said or implied that makes you think so?" Divergent thinking is encouraged.
7. Students are then assigned the remaining portion of the text to read independently.
8. The teacher facilitates a follow-up discussion of the material.

### A Review of the Steps



## Some Additional Suggestions Including Differentiating

- Teachers may want to discuss with students how they (teachers) select the questions they ask students about a text. Many students think that teachers have a teacher's edition of a textbook that has the questions in the margins that teachers should ask. Such textbooks exist, but most teachers do not generate all of their questions from a textbook. Students might be surprised to learn how teachers decide what is important for a reading and therefore determine what questions to ask. They may be equally surprised to discover how teachers decide what readings to assign students.
- Teachers could place students in small groups to work together and revise the questions before posing them to the teacher.
- Teachers should give students questioning prompts based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Critical Thinking to help them ask questions that demand higher order thinking. If appropriate, teachers could certainly teach students the taxonomy and display it in the classroom.
- In order to increase the difficulty, teachers could ask students to articulate the strategies they used in writing their questions. In addition, a high functioning group could be limited to asking questions only on the upper echelons of the taxonomy.
- The passage that the teacher chooses should have effective stopping points where the students can make predictions and compose their questions.
- Some teachers find textbook readings a bit less suited for this particular strategy. It works well with fiction of course, but articles from magazines, newspapers, and web sources may work better. It is also a very effective technique to use with the types of reading passages on the SAT and the ACT.
- This strategy is frequently coupled with another strategy called QAR (Question-Answer Relationship). That strategy will be featured in next week's *Literacy Light*!
- The questions students generate can be used to synthesize the most important information in the text, highlight academic vocabulary related to the chapter's reading, and create transitions and connections to other reading and research.
- Some teachers like to form ReQuest teams, a group composed of three or four students who can be pitted against another ReQuest team. The teacher's role is to facilitate the multiple actions that result in small-group formations.
- Initially, many students will ask factual and unimportant questions in order to stump the teachers or other students. Such questions can actually benefit the teacher in two ways: a) They show students that teachers are subject to the same restrictions imposed by short-term memory as students and b) When teachers miss an answer or two, teachers appear more human and as fallible as students are, and c) The low-level questions can serve as springboards for moving students to higher-level questioning.
- It is true that some students do not know how to ask questions that will stimulate interpretive or applied levels of thinking. In those cases, the teacher's role is to model good questions. Over time, teachers should notice improvement in the level of students' questions.
- This strategy can also be easily applied to listening and viewing experiences.
- Teachers of English Language Learners may find this article helpful. It is specifically about reciprocal questioning/teaching in the ELL classroom. It offers both theoretical and practical suggestions. See <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1569b42b-a15d-49bd-82ce-156628fbaac2%40sessionmgr13&vid=4&hid=15>
- For students who have difficulty comprehending, some strategists recommend students read one sentence at a time. Teachers should consider dividing longer, more complex texts into smaller, more manageable sections. It is perfectly fine for teachers to pause at the end of a brief section of text and complete the entire ReQuest process before moving on to the next section.

## Cross-Curricular Examples

**From Social Studies**—Before, during, and after reading a biography of a historical figure, teachers could have students create interview questions to be formatted like a television interview show. Again, teachers should stress that questions come from all levels of the cognitive domain: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

**Also from Social Studies**—One United States History teacher had students read a chapter from Hakim’s *A History of US*. Their questions included some literal-level questions, but most progressed to inferential and critical questioning represented by the following:

- Why was the Depression international?
- What is the Supreme Court?
- What does a war have to do with the Great Depression?
- What did the president do to stop it?
- Did these people ever find jobs?
- Were poor people finally helped?
- What is the organized system for buying and selling shares, or blocks of investments, in corporations?
- What does “on margin” mean?

The teacher reported that as one student asked a question, others returned to their textbooks to make sure the teacher was correct. This process pushed the students to complete multiple readings and review of the text as well as inspired them to create purposes and questions for continuing to read the text.

**From Math**—Before reading and solving problems in the initial chapters of an analytic geometry text, teachers may need to review the essential elements of arithmetic, algebra, and trigonometry that are used in analytic geometry. Teachers could provide small groups of students with text selections (like handouts) with information related to all three areas. Students should take on the role of the teacher as they read, forming questions to guide the review. Then the teacher should convene the whole class and use ReQuest for an interactive review, modeling to students the clarity of mathematical communication he/she expects them to aspire to during the course.

**From Science**—During a unit on the structure and mechanics of change in DNA, teachers could begin each class with a ten-minute ReQuest about the previous day’s learning and the homework reading. Students should be encouraged to identify questions about the processes in both healthy and unhealthy persons. Areas for questions include the following:

- Cellular reproduction beginning with the double helix theory of DNA structure and function
- Relationships between the anatomical and biochemical processes in determining heritable characteristics
- How genetic engineering can result in new combinations of genes and new inherited characteristics
- The evolutionary processes in terms of diversity that are factually observable

**From English Language Arts**—Before writing a major research paper, teachers may want to remind students of the criteria and proficiencies expected for the research paper. Teachers could ask students to skim a variety of classroom resources on effective writing to identify questions related to thesis statements, supporting ideas/evidence, voice, mechanics, citations, and other elements of the grading rubric. The ReQuest session could review the research parameters to ensure all students know the expectations for quality in their written research.

## Sources for This Strategy

Vacca, R., Vacca, J., & Mraz, M. (2011). *Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum*. Boston: Pearson.

Allen, J. (2004). *Tools for teaching content literacy*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2012). *Improving adolescent literacy: Content area strategies that work*. Boston: Pearson.  
(That publication date is not an error! It's a brand new book apparently from the future!)

[http://www.education.ky.gov/nr/rdonlyres/2d670309-9a31-427e-a85e-712fd1f2bc15/0/ccsso\\_contentliteracy.pdf](http://www.education.ky.gov/nr/rdonlyres/2d670309-9a31-427e-a85e-712fd1f2bc15/0/ccsso_contentliteracy.pdf)

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